INTERVIEW III

INTERVIEWEE: WILBUR COHEN

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

DATE: May 10, 1969

PLACE: Mr. Cohen's home, Silver Spring, Maryland

Tape 1 of 2

M: This is the third session with Wilbur Cohen. I am at his home in Silver Spring sitting on the front porch. It's a beautiful day; the trees are greened out. The date is May 10, 1969, and it's four o'clock in the afternoon.

At the end of the last tape, you mentioned four women that were important in the administration: Mrs. Johnson, Florence Mahoney, Mrs. Arthur [Mathilde] Krim, and Mary Lasker. Most of those women are well-known, but Florence Mahoney did not ring a bell with me. Can you identify her?

C: Mrs. Florence Mahoney, who is presently at this time living in Washington, is a friend of Mrs. Lasker. She has been very vitally interested in health matters. Her husband was the editor of a number of papers; I believe she is now divorced. She is one of the women who, as far as I know, had direct access to President Johnson on the telephone, easily, conveniently, and quickly.

In starting this aspect of the discussion, I'd first like to make this generalization. I found that President Johnson was the kind of person from his personal and political

experience who evaluated the judgments, the comments he got, depending upon his conception of the loyalty of that person to his interests. He was the kind of a man who would be perfectly willing to listen and repeatedly listen to the views of certain people whose contact and friendship had been built up over his lifetime and who he had fixed in his mind did not have any ulterior purpose in embarrassing him. I saw this in many ways in President Johnson, and the four women that I am going to discuss at this time have in my opinion this common element: that President Johnson could talk with them, get their comments, with the ultimate feeling that these people were loyal, friendly, and trustworthy.

First, of course, was Mrs. Johnson. Obviously Mrs. Johnson was the kind of a person who could talk to the President without any fear of his feeling that she was jeopardizing his political career or was going to reveal any confidences. I watched very carefully many times the very sincere and conscientious way in which President Johnson reacted to Mrs. Johnson. He was always a man who you could see trusted what she had to say. I did not hear her say things very many times in public to President Johnson, but President Johnson many times referred to what Mrs. Johnson had said so that I had a realization of how meaningful and important Mrs. Johnson was in his evaluation.

M: Did she talk to him then in private?

C: Yes, and I will give you an illustration in connection with a particular case in a few moments which will identify that, and all of these four women were involved in this particular one case which illustrates not merely the specific case, but their activity in a number of different areas, primarily in the field of health but not limited to the field of

health. Now, Mrs. Lasker worked with Mrs. Johnson closely on matters of beautification in a number of ways, but Mrs. Lasker was also one who for many years was very much interested in health matters. And there is a good deal of material in public on Mrs. Lasker which can be referred to in treating about her role in the whole business of developing the appropriations for the National Institutes of Health and so forth.

Mrs. Krim was the wife of Mr. Arthur Krim. He became a very close friend of the President's and raised money for the Democratic Party. Mr. and Mrs. Krim also have a ranch close to the Johnsons in Texas so there was an easy-going relationship between the Krims and the Johnsons', both in Washington and in Texas. I don't know how long the Krims knew the Johnsons, but it was obvious from the times I saw the Krims and the Johnsons that they liked each other immensely. And Mrs. Krim really had a very good evaluation of the President. In connection with the case that I'm going to tell you about at one point where I indicated that the President was bitterly displeased over the fact that Mrs. Krim and Mrs. Lasker and Mrs. Mahoney and Mrs. Johnson were all talking to the President about this particular case that I was trying to get the President to approve, the President said to me one time, "Oh, you're getting all these women to talk to me, and they're talking and talking and talking. And, look, Wilbur, they don't know what they're talking about." He said, "I'm getting sick and tired of them pressuring me," and so on.

I reported this to Mrs. Krim that the President was getting a little uneasy about this pressure from all these women, and she said, "Oh, don't let it bother you. The President likes to be pressured by us. That's something that he knows and understands. While he objects to it verbally, if you didn't do it to him, he wouldn't know how to deal

with it. So, let's just go ahead and put the pressure on him." Now, as a woman who was a good friend of the President, I think she had a very good insight into the President. The President could get indignant about this kind of pressure, but at the same time if he didn't have it, he wouldn't know how to operate because he honestly wanted these women's views. So that he would alternate between fussing at them and at the same time inviting their pressure. And I found the same thing to be true about Mrs. Lasker. Several times the President indignantly said to me, you know, "I wish Mrs. Lasker wouldn't try to interfere and pressure me and get me to do this and do that," but I'm quite sure that if Mrs. Lasker didn't do it for about a week he'd probably call her up and say, "Where have you been. Why haven't you been telling me what you think?"

Let me say one other thing, if I didn't express this before, about my view about how President Johnson operated. I believe that President Johnson from his particular experience operated on what I call the theory of political triangulation.

M: You've mentioned that once before.

C: Did I explain that before?

M: Getting various opinions and trying to get a common ground?

C: That's right. And here was another case in which he would try to bring together these different views of these different people before he would take action. The particular case that I'm going to tell you about is the appointment of Dr. Joe English as the administrator of the Health Services and Mental Health Administration which is within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Dr. English was the assistant director of the Office of Economic Opportunity in charge of their neighborhood health center and health services

program. He was a very young man in his early thirties, very personable, very dynamic, had done a good job. I was very much impressed with him, and I wanted to appoint him to this position. Now knowing of the President's great interest in health, I did not feel I could make this appointment without consulting the President, although the appointment was mine. The president had always told me that he was so deeply interested in health I should discuss these kind of matters with him. And this is another interesting point because the President took great interest in certain personnel appointments that related to the Great Society programs; and this was one of a number that I had to discuss with him.

When I came to talk with him the first time about Dr. English, he reacted very strongly against him because English was in the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the president expressed his deep suspicion of anyone connected with the Office of Economic Opportunity whom he said quite baldly to me, "These fellows are all disloyal." And this is an extremely important point in connection with not only this appointment, but several other issues I had with him on OEO, and several other matters that other people had with him on OEO. I said to him, "Mr. President, I know Dr. English is loyal; he's a very competent person; he's not been one of those people who has criticized you behind the scenes or undermined you." And he said, "Well, how do you know?" And I said, "Well, I know Dr. English." "Well," he said, "All of these OEO fellows are disloyal." Having heard the president say that for two or three years on other cases, I knew it was a fervent matter of concern to him, and I tried to convince him, but I was not able to do so.

It so happened that about that time that Mrs. Johnson was taking her farewell trip Mrs. Cohen and I went with her to New Orleans. And she went on to Denver. And in the

course of that, she was looking at a project with Dr. English in Denver, and she met Dr. English there. She received a fairly good reaction to Dr. English and I subsequently talked to her about her reaction. I then talked with Mrs. Krim and Mrs. Lasker and Mrs. Mahoney about Dr. English. I believe the only one who really knew Dr. English very well was Mrs. Mahoney. Mrs. Krim and Mrs. Lasker checked into him, found that he was very competent, and I think, based on what Mrs. Johnson told them and what I told them and what Mrs. Mahoney and others told them, they were convinced that Dr. English was a very fine appointment and they completely subscribed to my recommendation. I went back to see the President after they talked with him, but the President was still unwilling to give me his approval. We went through pretty much the same sort of discussion about the President's suspicion and antipathy to the OEO people. I told him that this was a man who I felt could carry on the President's and my philosophy of health organization that I had struggled so hard to develop, and that he would implement the President's program in a conscientious way.

Nevertheless the President did not give me approval again and he evidenced some dissatisfaction with the fact that Mrs. Johnson talked with him. He said, "She doesn't really know him; she just met him," and these other people really didn't know him. Mrs. Krim talked with him a couple of times, she told me; Mrs. Lasker did too. But finally it was Mrs. Mahoney who really called up the President and talked with him about it. And subsequently after, oh, perhaps either my second or third memo or my fourth or fifth meeting with the President on this, he gave me approval of the appointment. Actually, I also did one other thing during that period which was quite consistent with my evaluation

of how the President worked. The President wanted me to do several things during this period of time, including several things that he had me doing on appointments of other people, and so on.

M: Now, what time is this?

C: This is all after the election. And finally I told a couple of people in his office, either Larry Temple or Jim Jones or both, I said, "Well, if the President is dragging his feet on my recommendation, I'm dragging my feet on implementing his." And I said it with a laugh as if I were, you know, joking. But they said, "Gee, you're quite a politician."

And I said, "Well, I believe I know how to operate on this the way the President does. He wants me to do a couple of things. I'm very happy to do them, but I feel it's extremely important to do certain things I recommended and we can just make a package deal." And ultimately the views of all those women, plus this little stratagem of mine which I think played a small role in it, resulted in the appointment of Dr. English. Dr. English's appointment was well received in many quarters and as of this date that we're recording, he has been retained by the Nixon Administration and I hope therefore the health programs that have been worked on so diligently over the Johnson Administration will be implemented. The very fact that as of today there still is no assistant secretary for Health because of this controversy over the appointment of Dr. [John H.] Knowles is evidence of how important this man's role is, which is one rung below that appointment.

M: You say these women were especially helpful in the area of health. Did they also play a role, say, in foreign policy or anything else?

C: I am not able to say, but I know all of these women were people who visited at the White

House; they were the kind of people who had dinner with the President and who talked to the President. I can't speak about Mrs. Johnson, but the other three women were three women who were very much interested in health matters. Mrs. Krim was appointed to the Mental Retardation Advisory Committee; and both Mrs. Lasker and Mrs. Mahoney were on advisory committees of the National Institutes of Health. And I believe that they may have had other aspects, like Mrs. Lasker working on beautification, but I think they kept their activities pretty much to domestic affairs and primarily to health and medical care.

M: You mentioned that the President looked upon the people at OEO as disloyal, and you mentioned this over a number of years. Did he ever mention the reasons for that thought?

C: The first time that I heard the President state this had to do with the very famous incident of the so-called withdrawal of Title I Elementary and Secondary Education funds from the city of Chicago. This particular fuss occurred, oh, back, I'd say in l965--1966 early period. I was, I believe, under secretary at that time. Mayor [Richard] Daley was incensed at it and probably called the President or one of the president's assistants and the President was very much annoyed. And I was one of those who was in the meeting with the President at about seven o'clock at night and sitting there listening to the back and forth aspects. The President turned to me and he said, "Wilbur, you know anything about Chicago?" I said, "No, Mr. President. I know a little about it, but if you want me to know anything about it, I'll know everything I can about it as quickly as possible." "Well," he said, "you're going out to Chicago to resolve this situation."

So it happened that I was the one that he selected. In the course of that he told

me, "Mayor Daley thinks there is a conspiracy in the federal government of people in the OEO, the Labor Department, and HEW to embarrass him." Well, that was the beginning of what I heard him say on a number of occasions--that there were OEO people who were out to embarrass him and to make things difficult and tough for him. And he never gave me any individual, but every time I brought up any issue relating to the transfer of any program from OEO to HEW, as I did with regard to Head Start, Legal Services for the Poor, Health Services, Family Planning Services, or the appointment of any individual, he refused not only to do it initially, but always started out with, "These OEO people are disloyal." And I think, if I may make the jump in this because I don't have verification--I think he got it from Mayor Daley and that kind of-- And that stuck in his mind.

Now, I can give you one specific illustration that I'd like to record. I did recommend Bert Harding to the President to be under secretary. I was very strong for Bert Harding to be under secretary. The President considered it, and he never said that Bert was disloyal because he later appointed him acting director, but he never confirmed, he never approved that appointment, and as you know, he ultimately selected Dr. [James H.] McCrocklin for that position, asking me if I would concur in it before he did it. And I did concur unknowingly in Dr. McCrocklin's recommendation, but I will say this: I would have much preferred to have had Bert Harding.

M: Since you brought up Mayor Daley and the problems in Chicago, why don't you go ahead and tell that story, since you were involved in some of it?

C: Well, first let me say, in that particular illustration, I never had any direct dealing with Mayor Daley at all.

M: You never met with him?

C: Not at that time. At this time, I can't quite remember the date, whether [Anthony] Celebrezze was secretary or [John] Gardner was secretary at that time--I don't know. I was not the secretary. It was Frank Keppel as commissioner of Education who had made the recommendation to sort of temporarily withhold these funds pending some verification on the part of his staff through the state superintendent of schools, a man named Mr. Page, as to whether there was any discrimination in the school system in Chicago. They had been receiving information from a man by the name of Raby in Chicago and--

M: Do you happen to know his first name?

C: I think it's A. A. [Albert] Raby. And Mr. Raby was alleging a whole series of discriminatory actions, including discrimination in vocational schools and the elementary schools and teachers and students and so on. I only got into the matter at the very tail end of the discussions going on about sending a telegram which I was very uneasy about and urged them not to do at that time. I don't know who made the decision finally to send the telegram. I can't remember although I was in on the process, but of course once the telegram was sent out, no matter what the telegram said and you'd have to refer to the telegram, as far as the newspapers were concerned, what it was interpreted to be--federal government withhold funds from Chicago. Once that got in the newspapers in that way it was a big political issue, and the general attitude of Daley was, "You're taking away the funds from me without ever having consulted me. You never told me about the issue; you never consulted me or asked me what my views are. You never tried to get me to

resolve it. All you do is you send a telegram and I read it in the newspaper." And with that, of course, he probably called one of the President's assistants or he had direct access to the president or Marvin Watson. And of course the president took that again as being an indication that a lack of political judgment and a lack of understanding on the part of his lieutenants into the complexities of the political process.

And I was sent out there and I met with the chairman of the school board. And I resolved the question--I say resolved it, at least resolved it in a temporary fashion very expeditiously with the chairman of the school board. And when I finished resolving with them, I said to a Mr. [Frank M.] Whiston, "Wouldn't you like for me to step out of the room for awhile?" so I could call my office. And of course he said he would, just like that. Anyway, I gather he did, although I couldn't verify he called Mayor Daley to see whether it was all right. I called my office to say, "Here's what I've been working out," and he got off the phone and I got off the phone, and we typed up the agreement and it was all settled. I think the amount of time that it took him and myself to reach an agreement was in the nature of one hour, although we had lunch to get acquainted and so on. Obviously, he and the mayor were anxious to get a settlement, and I was because in effect the President had said to me: "You go out there and settle it," and quite frankly I was left with complete authority to settle it the way I wanted. Nobody ever told me how to settle it. I got no instructions. And everybody assumed, the President as was the case, had designated it to be settled, and I settled. I never consulted anyone. I didn't call back and say, you know, "Is this all right with everybody?" It was pretty clear that it was to be settled; the President had told me to settle it and I settled it.

M: And it was accepted back in Washington?

C: And it was accepted back home as a pretty good settlement. Naturally, Mr. Raby and those other people didn't feel that they'd gotten all they wanted, and maybe some of our people didn't feel we got all we wanted, but as in every kind of a peace settlement, both sides got something. And they got it within twenty-four hours, and things were back on an even keel. The President was very complimentary of me in settling it. I'm sure that and these other things stuck in the President's mind about my political ability to negotiate difficult settlements which I think was a mental image that the President had of me that I had the capacity to step into very complex political situations and work out a reasonable solution. I'm sure it was helpful to the President's image of me and future relationships with me, because I was always one of those who could talk to the President in a kind of not a political manner, but in making by recognitions, he had a feeling I was politically realistic. Of course there were a lot of other people who made recommendations to him, and if he felt that they weren't politically realistic or they'd not taken the political factor into account, he could be very stubborn, very critical, and very unyielding. And in most cases he was not that way with me. When we talk about the general question about the attitude of President Johnson to people who worked with him, I must say that except for one or two situations he was most solicitous of my point of view.

M: Since we're in the area of education, we might take that up as a general topic in the development of education programs. Now, I would assume that you were in on the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts and Higher Education Acts, and that you played some role in settling the rather difficult religious question that came up.

C: Well, I was in on every aspect of the education legislation beginning with 1961 right through the 1965 act, even later ones, but I spent hours with Ted Sorensen in the development of the 1961 proposals which were defeated. I spent a good deal of time on the 1962 proposals. I worked with Ted Sorensen on the 1963 one which became the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963. I worked very hard on the whole idea of the work-study provisions which were really modernization of the NYA--the National Youth Administration. I worked on all the aspects of these and particularly during those first three years with Sorensen who was really the mainstay of the development of most of these ideas. Of course, I worked with [Abraham] Ribicoff and I spent a lot of time with Adam Clayton Powell and the others and congressman [Phillip] Landrum, but as I look back on the period my greatest contribution to the whole area is the contribution which I really felt helped to unravel a whole situation. It was so simple that it is frequently forgotten.

This entire controversy over the church-state issue was one that no matter which way you turned, somebody objected. For instance, when we talked about the formula in the bill, if we used the children as a mathematical formula for allotment, by using only children in public schools then the people in the parochial schools objected because they said, "Look, you're not giving any credit to the private schools."

If we took all school children of any age, then the public school people said, "Why are you including the private school children in the computation when you are not going to give them any money?" Any way we turned on that, either in policy or in mathematics or in allotment or in financing--there was seemingly no perfect solution.

And I struggled with that and struggled with that and I was giving though[t?] to general population. And with a number of other people I thought up bills for giving emergency aid and so on.

Finally, during about 1964, Senator [Wayne] Morse introduced a bill that gave weight to several factors including unemployment, the number of children under aid to dependent children, and the bill was referred to the Department. And it was during that period of time that I finally said, "Why don't you use just a number of children in families under two-three thousand dollars? They're either public school children or private school--and it doesn't make any difference. They're just disadvantaged children." Now, I had gotten this idea from my studies while I was at the University of Michigan that grew out of my book of which I was coauthor, called *Income and Welfare in the United States*. And I had been studying during the late 1950s the relationship of income distribution to education, and poverty and welfare and I'd gotten a fairly good idea in my mind that income levels were a very good determinant of some of these problems. And I knew that they existed not only by state and by counties, but by other political subdivisions in the tapes of the Census Bureau. I knew there was no use suggesting something that didn't exist. And I said, "Look, why not substitute all of these controversial, complicated things for two thousand dollars, three thousand dollars, whatever figure you want as the income determinant, and then you will be giving money for disadvantage children, and the disadvantaged children want to go to public school or parochial school." Well, frankly I think and I say this with all humility here--I think that was the thing that everybody was looking for to try to come to some kind of solution to this problem that had vexed people

for about twenty-five years.

Now, back of that, I might say, was the fact that one time while I was working on this I ran into President Johnson at Walter Heller's farewell party. The President took me aside--he knew I was working on this--he said, "By the way, Wilbur, be sure that whatever you do you don't come out with something that's going to get me right in the middle of this religious controversy. I don't want to have the Baptists attacking me from one hand and the Catholics from another." I said, "Mr. President, I think we're working on something that will keep you out." He said, "That's the only thing I want you to keep in mind. That's the primary thing I want you to keep in mind." I said, "Yes, Mr. President." And with the help of Sam Halperin, who later became the deputy assistant secretary for legislation, and a couple of my people, I worked out this device which I think broke the log jam.

M: Now, how did you present this idea?

C: Well, I didn't present it. I just redrafted the bill with that in, and that's what we submitted.

M: And you worked with the White House staff on this?

C: I worked with the White House staff then in the development of that idea which was readily accepted. It was one of these things that once you propose it and discussed it as a substitute for the Morse formula, I don't remember any particular fuss about it. As a matter of fact, if you go back and look at all the literature nobody made a big deal about it at all. Sort of said, "Yeah, that's a pretty good idea." This is the solution to the Achilles' heel problem which had vexed the Kennedy Administration and others up until this time.

Now, I might add one other thing. That subsequently when I got involved in the drafting of the poverty program--I say subsequently, I think they both were coming just about at the same time--I suggested the same thing for use in the poverty program. You'll find that in the poverty program these ideas of making allotments for people with incomes under two thousand, three thousand dollars was also the method by which Congress was willing to go along with some of the ideas on the allotment of funds to states for poverty. You see, we're really talking about how you get money allotted to the States. That was the crux of the political, financial, and methodological problem in these pieces of legislation. Sarge Shriver called me to accompany him at the executive sessions of the poverty program in the House in which I worked out these kinds of formulas which were the solution to getting the poverty bill through. So that this idea, which was a very simple one, very simple, which really grew out of my work at Michigan, is what I call the exploitation of my intellectual capital while I was a professor that resulted in my being able to respond in these moments to the legislative creation of this legislation during the period of 1964-1965. And it's why I believe that so fervently bringing in people from the academic community who've been thinking about a problem enables them many times to be very creative in a crisis in the government, because they've got some capital that is useable under those circumstances.

M: Did people on the Hill fairly well accept this, people like Edith Green?

C: Yes. You can go read the hearings and by and large, it was very easily accepted. And then of course we had to work out a whole program that dealt with how do you provide educational services to these disadvantaged children who are not in public schools? And

we developed the remedial reading and the Saturday classes and the extracurricular activities and the non-educational aspects.

I might add that I was also in the meetings with Congressman Landrum that resolved this question in connection with the Poverty Bill. You see, both the Education Bill and the Poverty Bill had exactly the same issues. And the resolution of this made it possible to resolve both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as well as the Poverty Bill of 1964.

M: Was there any problem over the idea of block grants in the education program?

C: Well, we'd given a lot of thought to block grants, but you see the whole question of block grants depends on how big a block it is. There are small blocks, medium-sized blocks, big blocks; and what I say is if you believe in block grants, all you really believed in is saying, "My block is a little bigger than your block." So, it's simply a question of devising a block that was acceptable. The use of the word category always indicates: a category is a smaller block than somebody who wants a bigger block.

M: Did you get involved with Paul Fino when he got upset about the possibility of using block grants for busing purposes?

C: No, I didn't really get involved in it. Congressman Fino somehow got some kind of, as I recall it, intra-staff memorandum that had not been finalized for some purposes. And my impression was that he was using that as a political device to enhance his political reputation in New York. As much as I could see, he was lambasting the Office of Education on busing, so that the ethnic minorities in his district would support him.

M: In these education acts, did you have any conflict with the Labor Department, say, with

manpower training?

C: Well, not primarily at that stage. The major issues of the Labor Department started with the Vocational Education Bill of 1963, and became much more pronounced with vocational amendments as we went along. And Secretary Wirtz became very incensed about our point of view on that, and several times we had very heated discussions with Secretary Wirtz who became very emotional about it. And several of those issues were taken over to the White House under very great stress and strain of Secretary Wirtz. Even Secretary Gardner at that time reported to me the difficulties that he was having with Secretary Wirtz, who was extremely possessive and bureaucratic about his role in these areas. On a number of occasions in connection with this and other related problems, we were able to work out some reasonable solution with his assistant secretary, Stanley Ruttenberg, only to find that Secretary Wirtz would overrule him and reject the compromise because of his unqualified insistence that things be done in his way. During this period of time, Secretary Wirtz's and my personal relationship deteriorated very badly because he felt that I was the one who was not concurring in his views and making it difficult for him to get his views both in Congress and at the White House.

Fortunately, later on, just before I left office, I was able to work cooperatively with Secretary Wirtz in connection with the setting of radiation standards and demonstrated to him, I think, a practical way of going about the resolution of this. Fortunately, we left the Cabinet in a spirit of very excellent cooperation in 1968-1969, which was certainly quite different than what it had been done two or three years early both on Vocational Education, Manpower Development Training, and on the so-called

WIN program--the work incentive training program in the Social Security amendments and welfare amendments of 1967.

M: While on the topic of personalities, you must have had some dealings with Adam Clayton Powell?

C: Yes, I did.

M: In education?

C: Yes, I did.

M: Does his public image live up to his private image? Are they the same?

C: Well, not quite. In the first place, Adam Clayton Powell in my opinion was a man of incisive mental ability. He was a man who could understand the intricacies of legislation as well as the most able lawyers and the most keen-minded men in Congress. In addition to this, of course he had a both flamboyant approach in dealing with problems and a very unusual ability to dramatize things both in committee and to the newspaper reporters to exploit any opportunity on the press or the television. And so when you dealt with Adam Clayton Powell, you never knew exactly in what capacity you were dealing with him. When I first met with him in 1961, he was extremely sympathetic and cooperative with me and asked me if I could suggest a staff member for his committee. And I suggested a fellow colleague of mine at the University of Michigan and he appointed him to staff director of the committee. Subsequently, he asked me to appoint some Negro women [Grace Hewell] to positions which I did. And on the whole it was in connection with those personnel appointments and other things we began to work very cooperatively together. That was during the 1961 period.

Certainly at that time I felt that he was able, he was strongly for the legislation; he was cooperative. I felt on a number of occasions that you might not know what he was going to do next, but he was dramatic and as I said, flamboyant. But he of course was a master tactician and strategist in the legislation and one didn't quite know when one left, after having a discussion with him, whether he was going to carry out what he said or change what he was going to do ten minutes later. And he acted of course on impulse and on the spur of the moment and upon his interests as well as the interests of legislation and in the administration, so that his actions became such that one didn't always know what he was going to do, and I don't think he knew what he was going to do sometimes. That kind of mercurial action made working with him, of course, difficult, but interesting.

I think that he was extremely able and whatever one thought about his personal integrity, honesty, or his personal habits regarding women, sex, money, family, politics, during the period of the time that he was chairman of the committee, he was most conscientious as a chairman in expediting the committee's work and the legislation and carrying out the program of the President. I believe that one would have to almost do a combination political and psychiatric study to determine what exactly motivated Adam Clayton Powell, but certainly one could not say he was a man without ability. He was a man with great ability. And it is very unfortunate I think that some of his personal habits and personal responsibility interfered with his continuing to have a major role in the work of the committee and the Congress. I must say that in working with him I always had a great deal of anxiety about the permanence of the arrangements that were going to be worked out because he was one of these men who could easily change his view within a

few minutes, but I must say he's not the only man in Congress that I found that to be true so I would not unduly criticize him for that type of approach to the problem. That's quite typical of other political leaders who didn't have the same point of view that he had on other matters.

M: Let me move on to the general subject of health and health legislation. You've already talked on other tapes about Medicare and Medicaid and this has been covered elsewhere in other projects. But I might ask you about some of the other health measures, such as the heart, cancer, and stroke legislation, and perhaps also about the task force on health in 1965 that you were chairman of. I would assume that out of that task force of 1965 a great deal of the ideas came for the later legislation.

C: I did play though a major role in the regional program which was carrying out the recommendations of the [Dr. Michael] DeBakey report. The man in the White House who had primary responsibility for implementing that was of course [Myer] Mike Feldman. And it was his responsibility to work out those arrangements. He and I of course had worked together very closely over the years when he worked for both Senator John F. Kennedy and later for President Kennedy. And it was my responsibility to take the leadership for a major role in the drafting of the legislation, and later in the ultimate compromise on the legislation which made it possible to get it though Congress. As you know, here again Mrs. Lasker played a big role because she was the one instrumental in getting the DeBakey Commission established. She was instrumental in trying to get the legislation adopted, and it was in part my closeness to Feldman that brought me in closer relationship with DeBakey and Mrs. Lasker at that time.

The drafting of the legislation professionally was under the technical responsibility of Dr. [Edward W.] Dempsey, who was then special assistant to the Secretary for Health [and Medical] Affairs. But Dr. Dempsey was somewhat of a novice at the whole legislation deal. And we worked with him in the development of it and, Allan Wilcox who was general counsel took a major role in the framing of the legislation. My main role in that came about when the American Medical Association finally objected to the whole kit and caboodle, saying their objections to that bill were even more fundamental than they were to Medicare. And I arranged for them to see President Johnson, and I sat with their representatives in working out something like I think thirteen amendments which made it possible for them to endorse the bill. I got President Johnson's approval of those amendments; I went to see Mr. Oren Harris, who was chairman of the Interstate Foreign Commerce Committee on those amendments. He was amazed that with these amendments which were, he thought, rather unimportant the AMA would go along, said it was almost unbelievable to him. But they did. And it was only by that process that the bill was finally obtained.

I drew from this experience a rather interesting lesson about legislation which is that you don't always have to make important concessions to win support for a bill; sometimes the words are the difficulty. For instance, in the regional medical program, the word was used "the regional medical center." Well, the word "center" got the doctors all excited because the word "center" to them meant a building, and a building meant to them where doctors were going to be employed, which would be the central network for the authoritarian government dictatorship on the individual practitioner. That wasn't

what was intended, but when I in these discussions I agreed to drop the word "center" and use "program" or whatever words, they felt that this was a great change in philosophy and approach which they had won over the federal bureaucrats.

There were a series of other problems like that in legislation in which certain words used had formed an effect in their mind which substantiated their belief that this was an attempt on the part of the federal government to organize the medical care of the system in the United States under the medical schools, and by changing the words and changing a few of the sentences and adding a few things, the American Medical Association dropped its opposition to the bill and it was successful in being passed. Everybody was amazed that the concessions were so minimal and to some extent, verbalistic.

M: Why was DeBakey chosen?

C: Well, the reason DeBakey was picked as chairman of the commission is that he was not only an outstanding heart specialist, but Senator Lister Hill knew him very well. Mrs. Lasker had confidence in him, and he was part of the whole group of people who had tried to bring some concepts into this whole area. But I'd like to stress this other point. Immediately preceding this conversation, Dr. Howard, I think his name is Ernest Howard, Bert Howard, who is at the present time executive director of the American Medical Association and at that time I think the assistant executive director, came up to me and he said, "Wilbur, Medicare is a bill that passed. We didn't like it, and we didn't want it, but after all, it only involves the relationship of the government to the doctors. And by and large, while we're against it, we know that ultimately we can control the way government

acts toward the medical profession. But the regional medical program attempts to place the deans of the medical schools in charge of medicine, and that's a much more radical concept in that bill and we just happened to be opposed to it if that's what's in line. And, therefore, we just have to meet with President Johnson and resolve these questions before we could cooperate with you either on Medicare or this bill." That was the reason I arranged for the meeting with President Johnson and how we were able to resolve this question.

M: Now, what about this 1965 task force that you were chairman of, which apparently followed on the heels of the 1964 task forces?

C: At this particular juncture, I must say I can't remember all the recommendations. I was the chairman of several task forces over the period of time, and without going back and looking at my notes, I couldn't develop for you the specifics.

M: I would assume your reports would be in the records--the presidential records?

C: The report of the 1965 task force should of course be in the records. I was a member of several task forces, chairman of others, and quite frankly at this moment in time all of those task forces--there are so many of them that they kind of telescope in my mind. And you'd have to look at the individual reports.

M: Now, in the area of health, are there any other of the bills that stand out in your mind, such as mental retardation or health manpower acts?

C: Well, of course, quite a number of them are important. I particularly enjoyed my work on the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Act of 1963, because I believe that was the last bill that I worked on that president Kennedy signed. That was a Kennedy bill and of

course I went to the signing ceremony, and I really developed the whole mental retardation part of the program, beginning in 1961. I helped set up the original presidential commission on it, and subsequently I not only got the legislation through, but then later on I played a very major role in the creation of the President's Commission on Mental Retardation. I went to President Johnson with my recommendations to set this up, and he didn't want to do it initially. And it got into a big fuss because Sarge Shriver and Eunice Shriver, who were very strong for setting up the commission-- If I could put it this way, they wanted to keep control of it. And so they originally suggested that maybe Vice President Humphrey be chairman of it because they knew of Humphrey's strong interest in mental retardation because they have, I think, a grandchild who is mentally retarded. And the President was very unwilling to have Vice President Humphrey chairman of the committee; he felt that wasn't a wise thing to do to have the vice president chairman of this committee. And I ultimately suggested, when I was under secretary, that it be the secretary of HEW which he selected, which he approved, and of course I recommended Mrs. Krim on it--that's how she got on the committee because I knew the President felt strong about her and Mrs. Humphrey. But he wanted to put some of his people on it, and as you know Horace Busby is on it, Ray Vowell of Texas, and one of my friends is on it who is from Oklahoma, Lloyd Rader.

But I would say, I haven't looked at the records recently, I think it probably took me six to twelve months of negotiation with the President to get him to agree to the appointment of that commission and the membership of that commission. I spoke many times to Sarge Shriver; he spoke with me; I spoke with Vice President Humphrey. And I

tried to get it appointed because I wanted to have something to show Congressman [John] Fogarty who was very much interested that we were going forward in it. Fogarty felt we were dragging our feet. So again this illustrates the point how reluctant President Johnson was to go ahead with the appointment of any commission until he was satisfied that there were enough people on it who were loyal and sympathetic to his point of view before he would go ahead and appoint something which was important. I must say that while I respected President Johnson's interest in putting people on that he knew and had confidence in, the process became so cumbersome and so involved that many times it took an inordinate amount of time, but even that more energy on my part, the Department's part, and his part, before some of these commissions could be appointed.

M: Did you have anything to do with the clean air acts?

C: Yes, I had a major role in the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1963 and its amendments.

M: The 1963 one was the one that provided research funds?

C: Yes.

M: Was that to establish exactly what clean air was, or to set standards, or what?

C: Well, there were several clean air acts and I can't quite delineate them in my mind at this point. But they were mainly to have the federal government take a more vigorous role in cleaning up the air. I had my personal assistant, Dean Poston, who worked with me for the entire seven and a half years and was largely responsible for working on this, but again in connection with the final acts, I worked out the negotiations of compromises in the final act to get a reconciliation between Congress and the administration on those provisions.

M: What about water pollution?

C: I handled the Water Pollution Act of 1961. I personally, myself, while I was assistant secratary. And this had to be mainly worked out with Senator [Robert] Kerr. Because in 1961 Senator Kerr either was the ranking member or chairman or chairman in effect or whatever it was of the Senate committee, I think, on Public Works, that handled it.

M: Didn't the Interior Department take over water pollution?

C: Subsequently, the Interior Department obtained the program, and I feel that was a very unwise move. I was not in on the deliberations. This was a matter of administrative reorganization that Secretary Gardner himself handled with the White House. All I know is he told us at a certain point that President Johnson wanted the Water Pollution Agency transferred to the Interior Department, and he in effect had concurred in that. I believe it's because Secretary [of the Interior, Stewart] Udall had indicated an interest in it. The President agreed to it; Gardner agreed to it, and it was *fait accompli*. I think it was a very unwise and unsatisfactory decision, and my personal opinion is it ought to be transferred back from Interior to HEW. However, I think that Udall tried to do a good job in implementing it. I have no personal criticism against him as such, and I think he felt he could do a better job than the old line agency could do. At that particular time that that was transferred, Secretary Gardner was in effect promised the transfer to HEW of the education functions of the Indian Bureau and perhaps the entire Indian Bureau and some other aspect which never occurred. And fortunately didn't occur in the sense that the transfer of the educational function of the Indian Bureau became a very heated political matter in which the Indians themselves didn't want it, so the net effect was that while at

that time there was a kind of statement to Gardner, "If you give Interior the Water Pollution, we'll give you something in return." And it turned out to be a one-way street, and I always felt that it was an extremely undesirable action. I don't know what part the President played in it, or any of the other people because it was handled with Secretary Gardner.

M: Was there any particular difficulty with the President or the White House or Congress in the Partnership for Health Acts or the Hill-Burton Hospital Extension Bills?

C: I don't remember any except that in connection with the Partnership for Health Act, we had another name for it. Do you remember what the name was? It has slipped my mind at just this point.

M: Well, I don't recall right offhand, but--

C: There was another name for it, but the President liked the name Partnership for Health. Whenever he heard the other name, he said, "What's that?" And somehow the term Partnership for Health had such a wonderful political aroma to him that the only point I remember in connection with that was, "Well, be sure to keep the name Partnership for health and forget about that other name," whatever it was called.

M: How about the Community Health Services Act?

C: No problem about that one at all.

M: Or to move on to welfare--

C: First, I shou1d say in connection with the Hill-Burton Act that there always was a small amount of problem in that the Budget Bureau wanted to try to change the Hill-Burton Act from an outright grant legislation to an insured loan provision. In other words they

wanted to get that money off the federal budget by having it an insured loan, and I was not very sympathetic with this even though the latter part of my tenure of office I sent such a bill up to Congress as the final Hill-Burton Act, a proposal for an amendment. But I never felt that it had much political viability although I'm not opposed to the use of insured loans. I don't necessarily think they should be a substitute for grants; they ought to be a combination with grants to carry out the need for more hospital construction.

M: Well, to move on to the general topic of welfare, in the first tape we ta1ked a great deal about the development of Social Security, which has been fairly well covered, but there are some other acts in the realm of welfare which I might run down to see if you have any particular response to, such as the Older American Act of 1965 and another one in 1967.

C: Well, the Older Americans Act was a big problem, and it largely grew out of the fact that Senator [Patrick] McNamara and Congressman Fogarty had included in that bill a provision to set up an administration on aging which would report directly to the secretary. The Budget Bureau was vigorously opposed to putting in legislation a requirement about administrative organization, and both Secretary Celebrezze and myself concurred in that as being undesirable. McNamara and Fogarty were absolutely adamant about this point, and the people who they relied on were supporting the bill with them made it an absolute condition. Before Secretary Celebrezze went up to testify on it, he tried to clear the matter with Ted Sorensen and that must have been in 1963. And Sorensen inadvertently forgot to call Celebrezze back on time, and so Celebrezze went up and testified in opposition to this proviso in the bill. From that moment on, both Celebrezze and myself were *persona non grata* with not only Fogarty and McNamara

who was my own senator in Michigan, but most of the aging people who were supporting the Medicare Bill used it as a device to be critical of me in the matter.

They went to Ivan Nestigen as well and tried to form an alliance with him against Celebrezze and myself, and that's another aspect of how the relationship between Nestingen deteriorated, because Celebrezze felt that Nestingen was not being loyal to him, and it was one of the ways in which Nestingen felt a certain deep animosity to me for not playing ball with the people who he thought were politically smart and supporting Medicare. Of course, this was an extremely difficult thing for me because my own senator, Senator McNamara, was the man who was leading this fight and this endangered quite frankly my relationship with Senator McNamara which persisted till the very day he died, and complicated this whole fight on Medicare and everything else. But I felt that it was my duty to support Secretary Celebrezze on the issue, which I did, and I was completely convinced all during this time that the people who were working on this point were trying to make a simple matter difficult and politically complicated. And certainly that piece of legislation resulted in more trouble, more complexity, more animosity between individuals than probably any piece of legislation that I dealt with out of the some hundred and thirty-eight that I dealt with during my period of time.

When added together with the Medicare fight, you can see it compounded itself into a vast difficulty which involved Nestingen, Celebrezze, Ray Henry, Nelson Cruikshank, Senator [George] Smather, Fogarty, NcNamara, Victor Reuther--I could add about five or ten other people who were involved in all of this thing, all of whom in a sense should be exactly on the same side. And in a way if Ted Sorensen had just made

that call to Celebrezze and say, "Come out in favor of the administration on aging," and directed him to do it, the issue would never have risen. And it illustrated to me the adage of "for want of a nail, the horse was lost," *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. But I look back upon that whole squabble with regret and with some indication of how serious a problem can arise within an administration among people of the same political point of view over what I would say was a rather inconsequential and insignificant item in relation to what happened subsequently in, terms of the personal relationship. You cannot, unless you have talked with all the people at the time, I think, cannot realize what personal animosity there was because of that issue and the issue about Medicare.

M: What about vocational rehabilitation? Any problem?

C: I don't recall any particularly at this time.

M: How about various consumer protection acts?

C: Well, the consumer protection legislation that I was most deeply involved in was the truth in packaging legislation, which again was one of those that got into a great deal of trouble at the end. I was in on all the negotiations on that, but as you will recall on that piece of legislation, it was finally given to the Commerce Department to handle. And I think the Commerce Department legislative representative was Paul Southwick. I testified on the legislation, and the Commerce Department did, and [Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission Paul] Rand Dixon--the three of us were all involved in it. And Commerce Department had the central responsibility. Finally, at the end there again, it got into a big hassle and there were not enough votes to pass it.

So one Friday night late--I think it was Friday night, six or seven o'clock, I got a

call from Henry Hall Wilson saying, "We do not have enough votes to pass the legislation. It's dead. We've talked to the President about it; the President says you are delegated, Wilbur Cohen, to get the legislation through." And I said, "Does that mean that I have *carte blanche* to work out any compromise that I think is necessary?" He said, "The President said that since the bill is dead, you are to resuscitate it. You're to get it through." And I said, "Well, you know it's an almost insuperable difficulty, because the whole issue about sizes and standards and something--but if I've been delegated now and I don't have to talk with the Commerce Department and the Trade Commission and anybody else, I can do it. How long do I have?" He said, "You've got until Monday morning."

So, I'd been close enough to do it. I made four telephone calls, I think. One was to Congressman Jack Gilligan in Cincinnati. We'll have to look up his name--it slips my mind at the present time. He later ran for Senator and was defeated. He was in a difficult position because Procter and Gamble was in his district. And as you know, the legislative lobbyist for Procter and Gamble was Bryce Harlow, who later became President Nixon's Congressional liaison man. I then called Jake Pickle, who was President Johnson's congressman, and I called, I believe, the man from Georgia--name slips my mind. And I called Paul Rogers. I talked to them about a compromise which, as I talked to each one, I said, "If this compromise could be worked out, would you vote for it?"

And each one said, "Well, you know, that's a real possibility. I could maybe vote for that." And I reached Congressman Pickle I remember down on Rehoboth Beach on

Saturday. I don't know where I reached Rogers. I had a big telephone problem in reaching these men; they were gone. Practically all of them left town. I got them all. I proposed this compromise; they accepted the compromise. And on Monday or Tuesday, we worked it out and the bill passed.

So here again, as I look upon my own role in the Kennedy-Johnson Administration, I became the kind of man who at the end was brought in, you know, to reconcile these almost irreconcilable differences. And that's what I really did on Medicare; that's what I did on Truth in Packaging; the Clean Air Act; the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill; the Regional Medical Program. I've thought about this a lot; I haven't any idea where I got the ability, if one calls it the ability, but I certainly got the reputation under Johnson and under Henry Hall Wilson and Larry O'Brien of having that kind of capacity. And quite frankly I think--each of these experiences strengthened that image in the President's mind. And I say that for this record only to say that I think it was that image which finally, in his mind, made him appoint me secretary, because I don't think I would have otherwise ever been secretary if Johnson didn't feel that when that moment came that he had a man who had for the previous seven years demonstrated this kind of ability. At least that's my partial explanation of how I got to be secretary.

M: I want to ask you about that, but before I do, one general question about all these legislative programs. Did yea feel as time went by an increasing difficulty due to the Vietnam situation?

C: Yes, I found it so, not so much in the legislative aspect, but in the getting of appropriations to implement it.

M: You could get the legislation, but not the money?

C: You could get the legislation and then the implementation of it was much more difficult, as for instance in connection with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and in connection with a number of other laws. We could get then on the books, but you couldn't get the full authorization.

M: And then every time the Budget Bureau would come around they'd want you to cut back?

C: Well, maybe not cut back, but not expand. You see, some times on the legislation, there wouldn't be a cutback, but there wouldn't be an increase in relation to the responsibilities and population and social needs.

M: Did the President express any regret about this in regard to his domestic program?

C: Yes. In my discussions with him particularly during November and December and January of 1968-1969, when I was proposing getting so much greater appropriations requests, he expressed the deep regret that he couldn't do it.

M: Well, now, let me ask you about the circumstances of your appointment to Secretary? Gardner apparently left rather abruptly.

C: Yes, Gardner announced his resignation on January 25 and was much to my surprise and amazement; I guess I was just about the last person to know. I knew that there was a lot going on on this matter, but I think Gardner deliberately kept me out of the whole thing so as not to embarrass me. But I must say I was embarrassed because newspaper people and others knew that he war going to resign and in fact Joe Kraft called me about it and said, "I hear that he's going to resign." And I said, "I'll check with Gardner." And Gardner said, "No, there's nothing to it." And I called him back and said, "There's nothing

to it." And I felt very much like I was completely isolated on the thing and when Gardner called me in on the morning that he resigned and told me about it, I was aghast, absolutely aghast! I couldn't conceive of it at that moment. It took me a long time to understand why he resigned. And of course I really didn't have too much time to think about it because from the moment he resigned, which was on January 25, although he did not leave till March, he in effect left me in charge of the department. I was in effect secretary January 25, because Gardner's attitude was, "I've resigned; my usefulness is over. I've got to see people and I've got to do things. Wilbur, you're the acting secretary. You take charge; act like you are going to run the thing," and subsequently along the line there, he told me he had recommended me for secretary of the department. He said to me several times, "Act like you're running the department." And as you know I did. I think people were surprised that I took over the helm even though I hadn't been confirmed. That seems to be out of character with previous things, but I made up my mind that I ought to do what was right and that's what I tried to do during my short tenure.

M: Did Gardner give any reason why he left so abruptly?

C: Well, Gardner and I had had lot of discussions before he resigned. We had discussions after, but I never heard Gardner give a good explanation, really, of why he resigned. I've also talked with Douglass Cater about it. I think there are four people who know most about that, and that should he looked into. It's Doug Cater, who I think knows most; Scottie Reston, who I think knows most. The two men who I think know least about it are President Johnson and Mr. Gardner. I think that they got into some kind of an uneasy relationship which ended up with Gardner's resignation and I think it would take kind of a

very long explanation to completely figure it all out. Because John Gardner is a very unusual man, a great man. I enjoyed working for him, I have the highest regard for John Gardner, and yet, in this situation, all of the aspects of his final action still remain somewhat of a mystery. I really think somebody ought to explore it and write it up and I'd like to be one of those who would read it,

M: Did the President then call you in and tell you that he was going to appoint you?

C: I don't recall the exact date, but I didn't actually become acting secretary in name until March first when he left. The President, as I recall it, then did not-- I think I saw him once and he said to me, "Wilbur, you're acting secretary and just go ahead while I think it out." It was a very casual conversation. I don't remember it very clearly in my mind, but I think it was just sort of saying he had some other things to do. But I believe it was in March that he called me in along with Bert Harding and he made Bert Harding acting director of OEO and he nominated me for secretary. It was an interesting discussion because he called us both over to the White House and we sat together for a period of time not knowing what was going to happen. And the President finally called me in. I had an idea it was something with the secretary, but I didn't know whether he was going to name somebody else secretary or he was going to ask me to take another job or he was going to ask me to remain as under secretary. I tried to call my wife and say something was going to happen, but I didn't know what.

He called me in and he said, "Wilbur, I've made up my mind what to do." And still at that moment, I thought, well, he was going to say to me that he was going to appoint so-and-so as secretary, "Could you work with him?" and so on. And he said,

"I've thought it over and so-and-so, and I have a great deal of confidence in you and so on," all of which led me to believe that it was somebody else that was going to be appointed. And finally he said, "Therefore, I'm going to appoint you secretary." And of course it was a great surprise to me, but I was very gratified that he had that confidence in me, but I was quite surprised. And he said, "We're going to announce it at 5:30," or so on. He was getting ready for the news conference and so we only spoke a moment. He spoke a little bit about the under secretary, and he had a couple of names for under secretary that he wanted me to think about and asked me to come back and talk with him. Then my appointment was announced and as you know, it took from then--well, let me say this: I'll have to verify it, but as I remember, my appointment was announced about two weeks before the President made his March 31st announcement. And quite frankly, looking upon it later, I think they were related in the sense that the President felt he could nominate me, a man who had no political standing in the community because he was not going to run again. And as I look back on something that he told me during that time, it seemed that--I now look back on it as psychologically his saying, "Well, I'm really not going to run; therefore, I'm going to appoint you because you're the right man for the job even though you don't have any political significance." The reason I say that is I think he was thinking of some governor, as well, you see. I think he debated over whether offering it to a man like Terry Sanford or some other governor, that would have political significance. But I'm quite sure in my own mind that if he was going to run again, he would have appointed somebody of political significance. So in part I attribute the fact that I was appointed to the fact that he wasn't going to run and he rose above political

principle and appointed me.

Then of course, as you know, it took quite some time for my appointment to get around to being taken up by the Finance Committee; they dilly-dallied around with other things, and we finally had to put some pressure on them. And I was finally confirmed with one dissenting vote; Senator Strom Thurmond voted against me.

Beginning of Tape 2 of 2

M: Now, we've got you appointed secretary, and you've become secretary of HEW. HEW was described by Ribicoff at one time as a can of worms, meaning that it was ungovernable. I noticed in your annual report in the Secretary's introduction which will be part of the file which you turned in January 7, 1969, that you addressed yourself to that very question, whether HEW is manageable or not; and from what I've read in here, it would seem that you think it is controllab1e.

C: Yes, I think that Ribicoff's statement is incorrect, and I think it's an unfair statement. And I think it represents the fact that he was never interested in management, and he didn't have that capability; he didn't have the interest in HEW as an institution. He was more interested in politics and becoming senator, and he just didn't have the emotional background or experience in the management field so he naturally would feel that way, somewhat as a man who came in and was secretary only a year and a half. I don't think he really understood the department or many of its programs or its objectives. He remains a very close personal friend of mine and my relationship with him while he was secretary and senator was excellent, but I believe that Ribicoff was a politician through and through and certainly was not either skilled nor interested in the managerial aspects

of the department.

Now, perhaps every institution in our society, if you want to look at it in that way, is ungovernable, ungovernable in the sense that the institutions as they become big and diversified and so on have a lot of aspects to them in which man cannot completely control their ultimate destiny and their efficiency and so on. But my position is if you can run General Motors, if you can run IT&T, if you can run American Bell Telephone--and I could list any of some two hundred corporations in the United States with a chairman of the board and an executive director, then you can also run HEW on the same scale of relative efficiency and satisfaction that you can run most other institutions in our society. I don't think that it means that it has got absolute perfection or comparability, but in my opinion HEW is governable in that same sense that an institution can function reasonably well, And I don't think, as I say in my report, it's the size or the scope or the flexibility of the program that determines its ungovernability or governability. And I make a series of recommendations which I think will make it clear that it is governable. I would have a separate under secretary who was the general manager of the organization, somewhat in the model of the career public servant in Great Britain or maybe the man who remains as administrations change and whose sole responsibility is not politics, but the efficient operation of the establishment. Secondly, I would eliminate from HEW the responsibility for the determination of approval or disapproval under the Civil Rights Act, and give that to a separate board or commission, and that would relieve the secretary of his most difficult--at the present time, political factors which impair his ability to spend time on major policy.

With those two actions plus others that I have recommended, I believe HEW is not only governable, but I think it would be governable even if it were bigger than it is now. In other words, size is not the question as to whether something is governable or not if you decentralize responsibility. If you have good criteria and guidelines, you select capable people and give them authority, and you leave in the top men the definition of certain broad policy, in my opinion HEW is governable.

H: You seem to use as one of your reasons the idea that the central concept of HEW is a cohesive force for it.

C: Well, I don't say that it necessarily is. I can think of other concepts which are equally viable: a Department of Human Resources, which would include some of the elements of Labor Department on Manpower Development Training, Economic Opportunity, and so on would be even larger in a sense, but equally viable concepts, and in my opinion governable. And quite frankly, my own opinion is that there ought to be fewer Cabinet members than there are now. I think that there are too many people reporting to the President, and that something like eight or ten Cabinet members organized in Cabinet Departments would be a much more efficient functioning of problems that relate to the domestic sphere. I don't know that that's ever going to be possible, but it is my understanding that the task force by Ben Heineman, which was never made public, did envisage a somewhat broader organizational role than just HEW in the domestic front.

H: This was the Heineman report on reorganization of the Executive Branch?

C: Yes. And while I went with John Gardner and testified before them and I heard somewhat about their report, I have not seen the final report. But I'm not arguing at all

that HEW with its present functions is the only, or even the best way, to organize government function, but I don't think the decision ought to be made on size. Senator Ribicoff particularly constantly says HEW is too big. I think that's an absolutely irrelevant issue. If he wants to argue government is too big, maybe that's so. But the proper alignment of certain programs and the more effective alignment of certain programs seems to me to be a more important aspect of the problem than how many people or how many programs you have and so on.

Now, secondly, as you know, in my document, I make the strong case that the department in its present form should not be split so that education is placed under an educator, health under a doctor, welfare under a social worker, because I believe that is wrong in principle in putting experts in charge of their respective dominions. That leads to overprofessionalization and denies the government and any administration the primary contribution it can make in putting a generalist in charge of the specialists.

M: Did you struggle at all with the problem of relating HEW programs to a local level, say, to individual school superintendents? And how you go through the states or around the states?

C: Well, yes, I struggled with this in practically every program, and there's no good answer on that particular question in any way. If you go through the states exclusively, you put yourself in the hands many times of a group of governors and legislatures which are backward, which are reactionary, which are timid, which are unprogressive, and which many times put the domination of the rural people over the urban. On the other hand, if you go directly to the cities, you weaken state government; you weaken proper planning

and coordination, and either way is fraught with very great difficulties. Therefore, the only answer I see is of course the eventual change in the state legislatures both in the one man-one vote rule, the more complete voting of the Negroes and the poor people so that the state legislatures become more attuned to the metropolitan and urban problem that exist in this country, and so that you can work effectively with the states and the cities simultaneously. I don't have an exact formula, but I think this is going to be a big problem for whoever is president of the United States for many years to come.

M: Was there any particular difficulty in getting the Department of HEW to do the will of the president?

C: I didn't think so. I think this argument that's frequently made in many Departments, "Well, you can't get the old-line bureaucrats to do what the president wants," and I think President Truman said that a number of times and other presidents have. But in HEW I felt that I could get what the President wanted done reasonably well by explaining what was to be done, opening up the dialogue, getting it threshed out, and working it out. Now, it is probable--I've thought about this many times, that I had an advantage that many other people didn't. That is, I had grown up in my department. People had some conception that I knew what was going on; I was not like some person who had gotten in like ambassadors or secretaries who never heard about their function before, and had to be just helpless for a period of time. The day I walked in on January 20, 1961, in the department as assistant secretary, I knew what to do. And I did it. I sat down in my chair and I went to work, you know, and was working at full speed.

And you must, for instance, recognize the Nixon Administration still hasn't yet

appointed many people. Well, that's what gets things slowed down in the meantime. They don't appoint any people; the career service has still got to keep on going, and a guy only comes in for a year or time. Before he learns the job, he's on his way out. Naturally, all these things work toward that result of where it's possible to say the president's will is not carried out. That's one of the reasons why when I came back into government I stayed eight years. I felt that if you're going to do something, this business of just coming in for a year or two and then going out, why, for a new man who has never been in the department, it takes him a good year in my experience to find out really how it works and who to work with and what to do and what the problems are. And then if he's even going to put something into effect, he has got to stay around two or three years to see that it works the way he designed it. And so I think that it's possible to carry out the will of the president if you've got the right people, the right attitude, the right explanation; and my own personal experience is I did not find that to be a problem.

M: And your department could absorb new ideas and new programs without difficulty?

C: I felt so. Now, it's entirely possible that there were people in the department who didn't concur with some of the things that the President wanted or believed in, or were suspicious of, or suspect of, but by and large I found the top personnel, the key personnel and the others very willing to do what they thought the administration wanted within the law.

M: In some of the books that have been currently written there's the argument that OEO was set up separately because the Labor Department could not absorb that idea.

C: Well, there's a great deal to the point that when you've got some completely new ideas,

they will go farther and faster in a new agency than in an old agency. I don't think that's because people don't want to carry out what the President wants done. It's what the President is trying to do is still uncharted, as the poverty program was. And what you're doing is you're being experimental and innovative which requires a somewhat different mentality and experience than an old-line fellow who can take something and make it work in a methodical way. And that's why I favor, when OEO programs are once determined and something has been worked out, transfer them to the old-line agency and keep OEO as a creative innovative type agency.

M: Did you have any difficulty as secretary with people, say, in the Office of Education dealing directly with the White House staff?

C: No.

M: They kept you informed about what was going on?

C: I think that was largely due to Doc Howe. During the period I was Secretary, both Doc Howe and Sam Halperin, who were the two fellows doing most of that, we had very close working relationships and I never felt for a moment that anything was going on of any importance that I didn't concur in or agree on or could overrule. So I had no such feeling. I did feel that the job that Mr. Cater had in the White House sometimes made it difficult for a secretary to know what was going on between Mr. Cater and the President and the Bureau of the Budget; you many times heard about it later. But I think a job like Mr. Cater's in the White hone was as short as it was long. In other words, as much as he was doing that you might say might interfere with what a secretary might do with the President, it also helped. I mean, you could get things done quicker and you had another

string on your bow, you might say. So the role of the man who is a special assistant to the president is pretty much dependent upon who the person is, who the president is, who the secretary is, and how it works.

Now, in my opinion Mr. Cater's operation was one which did have a bearing on Mr. Gardner's resignation, but how or in what manner I am not able to say because I don't know about the relationship. I think I've expressed it in the point that it helped and it hindered at the same time.

M: Do you have any comment to make about the workings of the Bureau of the Budget so far as they worked with you?

C: Well, insofar as the Bureau of the Budget worked with me, I can only say that they were most helpful. I had strong differences of opinion with the Bureau of the Budget, but I did not consider that unjustified.

M: It's a necessary--

C: It's a necessary way of reaching a point of view about things. You're going to have differences of opinion when you come to Congress. You might as well have them threshed out in the administration and make a decision and know what you want to do.

And as a matter of fact, many times the Bureau of the Budget helped me--they gave me more money when they knew my problem. I mean, I think any secretary who doesn't win the confidence and respect of the Bureau of the Budget and his staff finds his job not only more difficult, but I think that's one of his key roles to work with him. And my relationship both with the Council of Economic Advisors and with the director of the Bureau of the Budget on key matters of budget and Social Security were very good.

Now, I don't mean to imply they gave me what I recommended. I don't mean to imply that I think they weren't wrong some of the time. But these are all people with important views and good points and a constructive point of view in my opinion, and essential to helping the president reach a decision. My only point is that really, under Kennedy and Johnson, in many ways the Budget Director and the chairman of the Counsel of Economic Advisors were many times more important than the secretary and I kept this in mind. They had the ear of the president many times more intimately, more frequently, and more sensitively than the secretary did because the administration is so eager to keep economic growth going on and to not get into tax and budget problems that these two men see the president much more than the other Cabinet officers. And neither of them are a Cabinet official. We talk about there being twelve Cabinet officers; there are really fifteen: these two men and, you see, the chairman of the Civil Service Commission.

M: You would rank the chairman of the Civil Service with them?

C: Well, I rank him with them because when you come to the personnel side, appointments, John Macy, more as the President's personnel advisor than chairman of the Civil Service Commission although he occupies the two positions is extremely important. So you've got the twelve Cabinet officers and these three, plus of course one or two fellows in the White House like, let's say, [Joe] Califano, I would say, either Califano or Sorensen or Cater plus someone else. Leaving out all the small agencies and everything else, the president is dealing with twenty people, not counting the head of the Veterans' Administration and not counting all the other people he has got to deal with on specifics. What I mean, he's dealing with twenty people who are of major Cabinet rank and

influence.

M: That raises the point too of just how important the Cabinet is. Is it still a viable institution?

C: The Cabinet as a collective body?

M: Yes.

C: It's a meaningless institution. It's simply a facade. Cabinet meetings are, as I said to a [?] that I talked with in Denmark recently on the role of the president of the United States, a Cabinet meeting would be as interesting as a tea party if tea were served at a Cabinet meeting, and tea is not served at a Cabinet meeting. So it isn't even as interesting as a tea party, because we don't have collective responsibility as the parliamentary governments do, and the Cabinet meeting is as far as I can see, under Kennedy and Johnson at least, was largely a waste of time.

M: Then when it comes to decision-making, it's made between the secretary and the president, with the help of the staff, or the secretary in combination with other Cabinet secretaries, or the Bureau of the Budget, or some of these twenty members you're talking about--

C: It's done on the basis of who are the relative people in arriving at the decision. When you're talking about Social Security, there's no use in having the postmaster general in. Now, if you're going to talk about mailing out more checks, why have the postmaster general in; but if you're talking about should the Social Security be increased ten or fifteen percent, what's the use of talking about that with the attorney general, the postmaster general, the secretary of defense? What has he got to do with it? He has got

other things to do. And so government in our system in decision-making is arrived at by the relevant people meeting together *ad hoc*, and that's done largely by the President's main assistants like Sorensen or Califano, or the Budget Bureau in the field of budget, or the economic policy of the Counsel of Economic Advisors taking this kind of leadership and doing it. And the Cabinet meeting is like a staff information meeting. If you called a Cabinet meeting staff information, that would be fine. When I say the Cabinet meeting is nonimportant, I mean as a meeting. It's very important for the Cabinet member in gauging what the president's psychology is, what the president's attitudes are, what the president's feelings are, what his priorities are. That's a part of a Cabinet officer's attempt to evaluate always what the president is thinking, and that's because we have an executive presidential responsibility, and not Cabinet responsibility.

M: One last question. Was the transition to the new Administration relatively smooth in your Department?

C: Well, I think so. First, the President had given instructions to assist in this, and I think that was extremely helpful for us to know that he wanted that.

M: Was this instruction to you personally, or was it to the whole--

C: The whole Cabinet members, to all Cabinet members. And the fact that the President himself saw each new Cabinet member was, you know, helpful. And of course my own philosophy of government was that it ought to be done, and I took the initiative to call Mr. Finch myself, extend to him my cooperation. He came in, he had lunch with me--his wife and daughter with my wife, sort of a family affair. We spent two or three hours. I briefed him, had my whole staff give him whatever he wanted. He didn't ask for any

confidential memos from me to the President. And there were two or three things pending at the time in which there were differences of opinion, and Mr. Finch and I were able to work out compromises with them. So as far as HEW is concerned, I think not only was the transition extremely well, but considering the transition in 1952 to 1953, it was done so much better.

I do think that the Republican administration finds it much more difficult to work than the Democrats do, because probably there are more Democrats in high position like in HEW than there are Republicans and they're naturally suspicious of these people until they find out that they are able people and that they will carry out their responsibilities. And I think that you'll find if you ask Mr. Finch or Mr. [Daniel Patrick?] Moynihan, they'll tell you that there are extremely capable and dedicated people in HEW. It's very program-oriented in HEW, very program-oriented in the sense that the people in there believe in their programs. They're not there for a job because they are earning monies solely. Practically every person who's in a key position in HEW, whether it's in education or whether it's in child welfare or whether it's in rehabilitation of the blind or caring for the mentally ill, he or she believes fervently in what he or she is doing as being a good program and that person is interested in doing more, doing it better, doing it more efficiently, caring for more people, being compassionate, being understanding, trying to develop new innovative and creative ideas, so that I think this is a program that you can build with. A secretary coming in that wants to take the leadership, demonstrates leadership, wants to govern the department, I think that he'd find the resources there to do what he wanted to do.

M: This exhausts the questions I have, but let me give you an open-ended one. Is there any comment that you wish to make, or any other subjects that you wish to bring up?

C: Well, there are lots of other aspects of my eight years of experience in HEW and in the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations that would cast interesting light on how men and women worked together in this government of ours. I think that I'm always amazed really that it works as well as it does. I know that there are many valid criticisms of the system, and there are many things that ought to be done to change it., and there are certainly many ways it ought to be improved--that should be done to improve it and to expand the program. But on the whole, it works better than most people think when they take a look at it. And it's more complicated when you get into it than it looks on the outside.

I think my major reaction from my own experience is that so much more needs to be done to improve the education in this country and the health programs, and so much needs to be done to reform the welfare system that we're going to have increased responsibilities in HEW during the decade ahead. And certainly, whether it's in HEW or not, the federal government is going to have to take on increased responsibilities, certainly for financing them. It may have to find new ways of administering these programs, of relating itself to the public and the private sectors, state and local. But I think that what President Kennedy and President Johnson tried to do and what they succeeded in doing was to create an increased institutional base which future presidents and Congresses can build on in a more satisfactory way than existed before 1961. I think the Kennedy-Johnson Administration had to create and add to the institutions that existed

where there were gaps and where there were nonexistent facilities which were only, you might say, developed financially and otherwise in a rudimentary form.

I myself would like to come back thirty or forty or fifty years from now and see how this structure which was developed in this incipient manner as I would say, was reaching some kind of maturity. And I hope we won't go through the same kind of period like we did during the Eisenhower Administration when by and large the major domestic problems of the country were not dealt with. This is the main reason why, during the Johnson Administration, so much had to be done. If you stretch out everything Kennedy and Johnson did in not only eight years, but over the sixteen years, because so little was done in the eight years, the average of what was done over the sixteen is not phenomenal. It happened to be concentrated so largely in a two or three year period out of sixteen. But that was simply because of our failures and our apathy during a large part of the time. And I hope that the experience of the Kennedy-Johnson Administration will be that this should not happen again, that there shouldn't be large gaps of time in which no new improvements are made. I think we would do a better job in this country if we had continual improvements and adjustments of the legislation and the staffing and the appropriation on a longer run basis because the programs could then have a natural life of their own. And that is what I hope will happen in the future.

M: Which would be salami-slicing on a national scale.

C: Yes, it would be doing the same salami-slicing every year. And that makes it possible for the American people, I think, to accept it. Because in all of this legislation of program development, we always have to keep in mind that it's very difficult for the average

person who's earning a living and doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about government and bureaucracy and appropriations and political compromise and how the political system works--he would prefer periods of nongovernmental activity. All that does is the problems continue to mount, and then you have to have a big spurt, just like Roosevelt had to do in the 1930s, like Truman tried to do after the war but was unsuccessful, like Johnson tried to do. And frankly that isn't the best way to go about it, but it has been made necessary by the sort of pendulum theory of American politics which probably is what we're going to continue to have. But if we were more rational, we would have a longer trend line rather than sort of hills and valleys of legislative activity and legislative inactivity.

M: Very good. Well, I think you for your time.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Wilbur J. Cohen

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Eloise B. Cohen, of Austin, Texas, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on December 8, 1968 and March 2 and May 10, 1969 at Silver Spring, Maryland, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in both the transcripts and tape recordings shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcripts and tape recordings without my express consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Eloise B. Cohen
Donor

November 2, 1987
Date

Frank G. Burke
Archivist of the United States

Nov. 30, 1987
Date